

## CORE ROUTINES of Nature Connection

### **Background:**

The “Core Routines” are part of a nature connection movement and cultural model called the “8 Shields Mentoring Model” or “Coyote Mentoring.” It was mapped by Jon Young.

### **From: Coyote's Guide to Connecting With Nature.**

The Core Routines of Nature Connection are things people do to learn nature’s ways. They aren’t lessons. They aren’t knowledge. They are learning habits.

Shifting our mental habits into these Core Routines of Nature Connection comes as second nature to all human beings.

This way of knowing was not born a few hundred years ago, or even with the rise of civilization thousands of years ago. Rather than informing, our teaching job educates ourselves and those we mentor to discover what the Haudenosaunee people call our ‘original instructions’.

*“Humans evolved with original instructions designed for dynamic awareness of nature. If we can inspire practice of these Core Routines, remembering our original instructions will happen on its own.”*

### **Sit spot**

The idea is simple: guide people to find a special place in nature and then become comfortable with just being there, still and quiet. In this place, the lessons of nature will seep in. Sit Spot will become personal because it feels private and intimate; the place where they meet their curiosity; the place where they feel wonder; the place where they get eye-to-eye with a diversity of life-forms and weather-patterns; the place where they face their fears —of bugs, of being alone, of the dark —and grow through them; and the place where they meet nature as their home.

### **Expanding Sensory Awareness**

For nature connection, we use only one golden rule: notice everything. Get down in the dirt and feel it. Open your eyes and detect peripheral movement. Hear the far-off cry of the hawk and the wind in the trees. Smell the scent carried in the warm breeze. Feel the direction of sun. Taste the safe wild edibles. At every opportunity, we expand sensory awareness until doing so becomes routine, a practice, a habit, a discipline, and finally, a brain pattern.

Sensory Awareness is central to our development as people because it is the main tool for influencing the cycle of our brain patterning. Disengagement of stuck patterns of thought, behavior, and perception and renewal of the clients’ ability to engage, integrate, and interact with their world requires constant cultivation of their sensory perception of landscape and relationships to it. One’s senses become the very foundation of how one defines oneself within the world. (p 65. Nature connection and Gestalt)

### **Questioning**

Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? Like peering through a window into wildlife, questioning and watching can be endlessly fascinating. By capturing imagination and empathy, it demands whole-brain intelligence and concentration. Like reading, studying the sign and following the trails of animals, develops powers of pattern recognition that stay with you for the rest of your life.

## **Animal Forms**

Observe animals to see how the animals walk, run, eat, dance, and then in games model those animal forms. This potent routine might seem a bit different from the others, more akin to dance than mental gymnastics. What we call Animal Forms simply imitates the physical and mental actions of animals, birds, and to some extent even grass, wind and water. This kind of practice can be found in cultures across the globe. For instance, think of the many martial arts from Asia based on imitation of animals, such as crane, tiger, or turtle. Also, many indigenous cultures conducted imitative dances and dramas, often with accompanying masks and costumes. The Hawaiian Hula, an ancient and modern dance form, brilliantly demonstrates such animal and nature dances. Cave paintings in Europe and old European stories indicate that the ancestors of Europeans did the same. Our own Indigenous people in Australia imitate animals, in sacred ceremony and dance, taking on the movements, the feelings their way of being.

## **Wandering**

Wander through the landscape without time, destination, agenda, or future purpose; be present in the moment; and go off-trail wherever curiosity leads. Unstructured time, wander, walk-about –during this timeless, unstructured play anything is possible and self-guided experience leads to wonder, curiosity and learning. There is nothing to accomplish, nowhere to go. By just being present in the moment, curiosity gently leads us wherever we go.

## **Mapping**

Orient to the compass directions, and perceive the landscape from a bird's eye view. Draw maps to locate features of the landscape or tell stories that map your explorations. A natural routine familiar to anyone who's ever driven in a big city, mapping orients us and shows us the gaps in what we notice. It creates a need for people to know what bird that was by the swamp, or where that creek goes. It also brings the landscape to life as the diversity of natural signposts emerges through the connections between birds and berry bushes, between between bodies of water and the daily movements of animals.

## **Journaling**

Stories can be told to a journal. This might be done through drawing or art, or writing, depending on the skill and interest of the author/artist. Journals are a great way to record experiences with sit spot, create personal field guides, or keep seasonal records.

## **Mind's Eye Imagining**

Use and strengthen your imagination as much as possible, imprinting images in your mind to gather from the experience of all five senses. This routine develops our imagination and our ability to re-experience events with our eyes closed. To teach "nature literacy," then see with the Mind's Eye, we must go one step beyond plain reading into reading with the intent to "learn by heart." Not only visual images, but also smells, flavours, sounds, and textures imprint in magnificent detail in people's brain patterns when they rely on their nature literacy for survival. Routinely imagining with our minds eye allows our sensory experiences to really sink in. This skill provides us with the dynamic memory for field biology and bird watching and is the evidence for a well-developed 'naturalist intelligence.'

## **Appreciation**

How is “appreciation” a routine for nature awareness? If we all find in yourself a grateful heart and express gratitude for any and all aspects of nature and life, if we begin every episode with acknowledgment and appreciation to the caretakers of this land, the past and present as well as the creator of the creations. If we give nods of thanks as you go about your day, then we will redevelop the connections that our ancestors had to have to survive. We reinforce the interdependence of all living things and their ground of being, and reminds us of our kinship with nature. Make time for sharing appreciation for general things that benefit all of us as well as specific to our own lives.

## **Story of the day**

Story telling knits the society together. The men would go out for a day of tracking and hunting, while grandmothers and children might harvest berries, root vegetables, or bark to make thread and cloth. Around the fire at night they would gather and report the stories of their days. This exchange of stories is very important to humans.

## **Listening for Bird Language**

Be still and listen. Quiet down and crane your ears and eyes to notice the vocal signals and body language of birds and other animals, including humans. What message do you hear in their voice?

**Note:** it is important that these “core routines” be creatively and artfully inserted into our work as nature connection mentors –in many cases, those we work with should not feel they are practicing “core routines.” The magic is often working in the background so these routines are present, but invisible to the outside eye.